UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social
Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/C.12/1997/SR.14
24 June 1997

ENGLISH
Original: FRENCH

COMMITTEE ON ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Sixteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE PUBLIC PART*
OF THE 14th MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Wednesday, 7 May 1997, at 10 a.m.

Chairperson: Mr. ALSTON

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* The summary record of the closed part of the meeting appears as document E/C.12/1997/SR.14/Add.1.

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GE.97-16544 (E)

The meeting was called to order at 10.05 a.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS:

(a) REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES IN ACCORDANCE WITH ARTICLES 16 AND 17 OF THE COVENANT (agenda item 7) (continued)

Third periodic report of the Russian Federation (E/1994/104/Add.8; HRI/CORE/1/Add.52/Rev.1; E/C.12/Q/RUS.1; E/C.12/A/RUS.1) (continued)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of the Russian Federation took places at the Committee table.

Implementation of articles 6 to 15 of the Covenant (continued)

2. Mr. VAROV (Russian Federation), replying to a question raised by Mr. Texier on the right to housing, said that considerable progress had been made in 1995-1996, in spite of economic and financial difficulties. In 1995, housing had been provided to 2 million people, some of them homeless. However, there were still 6.5 million people on the waiting list.

3. Mr. RIEDEL, referring to questions 44 and 45 of the list of issues to be taken up (E/C.12/Q/RUS.1), asked what concrete measures had been taken to combat HIV infection. He would particularly welcome further information on the strategy adopted in that regard by the Russian Parliament, which, if the international press were to be believed, contradicted the recommendations of the World Health Organization (WHO).

4. Mr. GRISSA, noting that the delegation had not replied to question 46 of the list of issues, asked what had been the effects of the Chernobyl disaster and whether any measures had been taken to obviate the risk of future nuclear accidents.

5. Mr. SA'DI asked to what extent the private sector was helping to solve the housing problem by building affordable housing.

6. Mr. CEAUSU asked the delegation for more information on measures to combat alcoholism, drug abuse and other social habits harmful to health. He wished to know whether those phenomena were responsible for the steep decline in life expectancy at birth, particularly for men.

7. Mr. ADEKUOYE asked about the psychiatric hospitals, which, at the time of the former Soviet Union, had been used for improper purposes. What steps had been taken to combat the increase in the suicide rate? Had any proposals been made for improving the financial situation of the pharmaceutical sector (E/1994/104/Add.8, para. 253) and, if so, with what results?

8. Mr. CEVILLE asked what was the Government's policy towards the poor sanitary and hygiene conditions prevailing in penal institutions, where tuberculosis was rising more than elsewhere and a major cause of death among inmates.

9. Mr. MONISOV (Russian Federation), replying to Mr. Riedel, said that there were 78 territorial centres and 5 regional centres for combating the AIDS epidemic. In addition, several centres provided treatment for HIV-infected persons and a network of diagnostic laboratories had been set up. In 1996, the Government had extended the federal anti-AIDS programme to the year 2000. The programme was aimed at sensitizing the population to methods of preventing HIV infection and sexually transmitted diseases. Measures had been taken to develop new drugs, screening tests and faster diagnoses. In 1995, a law on prevention of HIV infection had been enacted. There was no appreciable difference between the strategy of the Duma and the Ministry of Health policy, which, on the recommendation of WHO, was aimed at reducing the cost of health care while limiting HIV screening to blood donors and medical personnel exposed to the risk of infection. There was no compulsory screening for drug addicts or homosexuals. However, non-nationals wishing to obtain an entry visa had to present a certificate proving that they had had an HIV screening test.

10. Regarding pollution, the situation had improved thanks to a reduction in industrial emissions of environmentally harmful products. Economic development plans must henceforth take environmental protection into account. A federal law on drinking water was currently being drafted. A federal programme had also been developed to improve the quality of drinking water through the use of new technologies. In answer to Mr. Grissa's question, a programme had been set up to deal with the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster. The victims were receiving medical follow-up and government allowances. The situation had improved in the contaminated areas, which were provided with foodstuffs from elsewhere. In 1996, the Ministry of Health had defined new standards for radio-nuclear security in order to protect the population from all sources of natural and non-natural radiation. Thanks to legislation, the risks of future accidents had been reduced to a minimum. Furthermore, the Ministry of Nuclear Energy had prepared a series of vital measures to be implemented in nuclear plants.

11. As to combating alcoholism and drug addiction, the Government was attempting to increase the number of clinics to which drug addicts could turn anonymously for treatment. In addition, information campaigns were being conducted and symposia organized for school teachers and university professors, some of them with the help of WHO, in order to inform schoolchildren and students of the risks of drug addiction and methods of AIDS prevention. Federal legislation would also have to be amended in order to make it compulsory for drug addicts and alcoholics to undergo treatment.

12. Regarding the difficulties of the pharmaceutical industry, the production of drugs was one of the priorities of the Ministry of Health, and a national programme had been adopted to that end. Measures had also been taken to reduce the duty paid on imported medicines. The problem lay in the high cost of drugs. Many people did not have the means to buy any, and in certain territories and regions it was frequently difficult to provide medicine free of charge or at half price to persons entitled to that benefit, including retirees. The Government was currently preparing a list of 250-280 basic drugs whose prices should be low.

13. In reply to Mr. Ceville, the Government had recently asked the Ministry of Health to prepare a federal programme for combating tuberculosis. The programme would be aimed at helping hospitals equip themselves and obtain medicine. A draft federal law had also been prepared in order to provide care to persons with tuberculosis. To improve the situation in the prisons, the Government had devised new standards on the diet of detainees. The Ministry of the Interior had created special areas and health stations for prisoners with tuberculosis. The Ministry of Health was helping to improve the sanitary conditions in detention centres and to provide care for patients, including those with tuberculosis.

14. In reply to Mr. Adekuoye's question, the situation had changed radically in psychiatric institutions, which could no longer serve improper objectives. In late 1996, the Ministry of Health had taken steps to assist those establishments, many of which faced alarming material problems.

15. Mr. VAROV (Russian Federation) provided additional information on the state of the environment. As a result of the decrease in production brought about by the country's economic difficulties, the situation had improved considerably in almost all parts of Russia. In the past two years, emissions of toxic substances had dropped considerably, although a good deal remained to be done in that area. Measures taken to combat air and water pollution had greatly contributed to the improvement.

16. As to the housing stock and the role played by the private sector in housing construction, in early 1997, more than 50 per cent of housing units had been owner-occupied, more than 36 per cent of housing units had been built by private entities, and 30 to 40 per cent of the housing stock had been built by the State. The State had taken various steps to promote housing construction. The amounts spent by individuals to build their own homes were tax-exempt and the State provided considerable assistance, with the reimbursement of loans being spread out over more than 25 years. It was to be hoped that, with the improved economic situation, the problem would soon become less serious.

17. Mr. SA'DI said he had hoped the representative of the State party would reply more candidly to his question by stating that environmental problems were not a priority for a country in transition to a market economy, as was the case of the Russian Federation. The AMOCO report demonstrated that the authorities' concerns were far removed from those problems.

18. Mr. VAROV (Russian Federation) said that the question of the environment and its protection was very complex, even critical, in the Russian Federation, as recognized in the core document and in the additional information that had been provided. In spite of everything, some positive developments were seeing the light. The activities of oil companies, among others, had a negative environmental impact. The Russian Federation had recently introduced the idea not only of administrative and criminal responsibility but also of pecuniary responsibility in that regard. In 1996, billions of roubles had been paid in fines by polluting enterprises that did nothing to protect the environment. The problem of the environment was still, however, of a much greater scale than the solutions that had been proposed.

19. He suggested grouping together the replies to questions 47 to 52 of the list of issues and to the additional questions raised by members of the Committee in order to give general information on the implementation of the right to education.

20. The main difficulty in that domain was one of financing, whether of teachers' salaries, teaching materials or any other educational requirements. The Federation was, however, doing everything possible to find a solution. It had already been able to develop its potential in that field: 34 new higher educational establishments had been created and the number of public and private educational establishments for secondary and specialized education had increased, as had the number of teachers and length of schooling. The Federation's statistical data showed that the situation had improved in relation to what it had been at the end of the Soviet era. That testified to the efforts undertaken by the Government. In the field of vocational and technical training, however, problems remained: the number of establishments had actually dropped. Nonetheless, efforts had recently been made not only to stabilize the situation but even to improve it.

21. He regretted that the Law on education had not been fully implemented due to the economic difficulties of the Federation, and in particular the fact that teachers earned about 60 per cent less than people in industry. As to the situation in institutions of secondary education, 99.9 per cent of the students finished their courses and obtained a diploma.

22. No first-hand statistical data were available on the connection between the degradation of the educational system and the increase in juvenile crime, but expert assessments suggested there was no direct link. Economic factors were most likely to be the cause.

23. Mr. WIMER asked what the Russian Federation was doing to avoid a brain drain, with all its scientists being driven out of the country as a result of its economic difficulties.

24. Mrs. JIMENEZ BUTRAGUEÑO asked what importance was given in the educational system to human rights.

25. Mr. GRISSA said he did not understand how the secondary school drop-out rate could have been reduced practically to zero as long as the country's economic difficulties continued.

26. Mr. ADEKUOYE asked for information on what percentage of resources had been spent on education in 1993, 1994, 1995 and, if possible, 1996. Were school authorities who did not fulfil their obligations penalized? If so, what was the nature of their punishment? He also wished for further information on the language of instruction mentioned in paragraphs 267 and 268 of the report and on the use in the Administration of languages of different nationalities.

27. Mr. RIEDEL asked if it was not the closure of the scientific and technical institutes, among other factors, that was driving the elite out of the country. What steps were being taken to improve the situation?

28. Mr. THAPALIA inquired what were the possibilities for the multitude of nationalities and ethnic groups comprising the Russian Federation to receive education in their mother tongue. What was the salary of a teacher and of a civil servant? Were there any wage gaps between teachers based on the language they worked in? What steps was the Government taking in that regard?

29. Mr. CEAUSU, with regard to the right of citizens to receive education in their mother tongue, referred to in paragraph 290 of the report, asked about the status of the various national groups. Could one or two examples be given? For instance, was primary education in the Tatar Republic provided in the Russian language or in the Tatar language? What was the role of the Public Prosecutor, referred to in paragraph 309? In a society based on the rule of law, was it normal for the Public Prosecutor to supervise schools?

30. Mr. VAROV (Russian Federation) regretted the brain drain, which went back to 1917 and was or had been based on political or economic reasons or even on family reunification. The solution was obvious: social and material recognition should be given to those working in science and culture. That was what the Federation was currently attempting to do. An improvement in the situation could be hoped for. The level of remuneration was currently much higher than it had been and was approaching European levels.

31. The question on the attention given to human rights in education had already been answered; in the higher grades, it was an integral part of a course on the foundations of law. As a jurist, however, he had to acknowledge that the quality of that education still left much to be desired.

32. The remark about the statement having been lacking in candour was undoubtedly based on a misunderstanding in the transmission of information provided by the delegation of the Russian Federation. The economic difficulties to which reference had been made certainly existed, but the country was not on the verge of bankruptcy. Negative reports on the non-payment of teachers' salaries, for example, should not be overestimated. The country was developing on the political, economic and social levels; there was no reason to paint a totally bleak picture. The statistical data provided were reliable. The situation had stabilized in some sectors and was improving in others, that was indisputable. As to the percentage of the gross domestic product (GDP) spent on education, the figures requested were the following: 1989, 8.3 per cent; 1990, 14.7 per cent; 1991, 14.4 per cent; 1992, 11.4 per cent; 1993, 12 per cent; and 1994, 11.7 per cent.

33. Penalties were indeed provided for where individuals failed to comply with their teaching obligations. The penalties were primarily disciplinary in nature and could extend to dismissal. Inspection units were responsible for checking on the quality of education. If private institutions failed in their obligations, their Government permit could be withdrawn.

34. As concerned the languages spoken in the Russian Federation, it should be recalled that there were more than 178 nationalities and other ethnic groups. Obviously it was difficult to provide education in all those languages. However, all the subjects of the Russian Federation, without exception, received education in the language of the particular Republic,

whether they were Yakuts, Adygeis, Kalmyks, Bashkirs or Tatars, to name but a few. That was a matter for the authorities of the Republics, who were currently empowered to solve such problems independently.

35. In relation to measures taken to stop the brain drain, which constituted a serious economic loss for the country, a decision had recently been adopted by the President of the Federation in order to enhance the prestige of intellectual work and solve the problem as quickly as possible.

36. He did not have any detailed statistical data on the number of instructors teaching the language of a given ethnic group, the number of students following such education or the salaries for such teachers. That fell within the competence of each Republic. The salaries of teachers working in Russian or indigenous languages were the same, the only differences being of a regional nature or depending on the type of establishment.

37. The role of the Public Prosecutor, referred to in paragraph 309, was to ensure respect for human rights and to verify that human rights were respected in the functioning of State bodies. Some habits were difficult to change, but the situation was evolving, particularly where standards were concerned, and the most recent legislation defined the role of the Public Prosecutor more precisely.

38. The CHAIRPERSON said that the Committee had thereby concluded its consideration of the third periodic report of the Russian Federation.

The public part of the meeting was suspended at 11.45 a.m. and resumed at 12.15 p.m.

Initial report of Peru (E/1990/5/Add.29)

39. At the invitation of the Chairperson, the members of the delegation of Peru took places at the Committee table.

40. Mr. HERMOZA-MOYA (Peru) said that economic, social and cultural rights, which, like all other human rights, were inalienable and universal, were distinguished by the fact that their realization could only be progressive. He would not attempt to demonstrate that Peruvians really did enjoy all the rights under the Covenant, but rather to describe the measures taken by the Government progressively to guarantee the full realization of those rights, it being understood that the respect of economic, social and cultural rights was closely linked to the country's level of economic development.

41. Aware that poverty was the main obstacle to the effective enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, the Peruvian Government had immediately attempted to improve the economy following the grave crisis the country had undergone in the early 1990s. It had devised a strategy for combating poverty based on the generation of jobs and income and, taking strict account of the country's actual financial capacity, aimed at reducing the number of poor people from 4.5 to 2.2 million by the year 2000.

42. The implementation of that anti-poverty strategy involved several sectors of the Administration. The Ministry of the Presidency had helped to

realize the social objectives by devoting itself particularly to meeting the basic needs of the poorest segments of the population and by a favourable climate for private investment. The Ministry of Agriculture had prepared a programme to encourage the creation of businesses in sectors where the poverty rate was highest, with the objective of increasing the revenues and standard of living of peasant and indigenous communities. Given the priority role of the farming sector, the Government paid special attention to peasant communities, which were duly protected. In cooperation with the International Labour Organization (ILO), and with financial assistance from the United States Agency for International Development, the Peruvian Government had implemented a special programme for the protection of indigenous communities, which was mandated to receive and rule on complaints of violations of the rights of indigenous populations.

43. As part of the anti-poverty strategy, social spending held a privileged place in Peru's investment plans, which had led to the creation of the national Compensation and Social Development Fund (FONCODES). Originally, FONCODES had been intended to remedy the negative impact on the neediest people of economic policy measures the Government had been compelled to take. Subsequently, its mission had been to help disadvantaged populations and to contribute to reviving the country's small, medium-sized and microenterprises. In August 1996, after five years of activity, the Fund had carried out 20,000 projects in most of the country's districts at a total cost of more than $750 million, 74 per cent of which had been financed from national resources and 26 per cent through international cooperation.

44. Aware that education was an important factor in combating poverty, the Government had always encouraged elementary, primary and secondary education, which were compulsory, and had made it a priority to eradicate illiteracy, which had now fallen to 10.5 per cent, as against 12.8 per cent in 1993. The Government was planning to bring it down to 4 per cent by the year 2000, which was about the global average. The education policy was also being applied with a view to ensuring equality between the sexes. The recently created Ministry for the Advancement of Women and Human Development was responsible for ensuring respect for women's rights in all areas, with the objective of securing greater participation by women in public life and improving their status in the fields of education and employment. Women's illiteracy rate had fallen, and job creation programmes had been implemented to bring down their unemployment rate, which was 11.1 per cent, as against 8 per cent for men.

45. Since employment was of vital importance in combating poverty, the Government accorded great importance to vocational training. The two modes of training called for by the Job Promotion Act, namely, vocational training agreements for the young and apprenticeships, had enjoyed a real boom in 1996; the former had increased threefold over 1995 and the latter had risen 40 per cent. In order to create the conditions necessary for an increase in productive investment, the Government had restructured the Labour Inspection Unit by strengthening its role in advising workers and employers on their rights and duties. The Ministry of Labour had created a free legal advice unit for low-income workers. In collective bargaining, the Government ensured that labour relations between employees and management were conducted freely, without State intervention. Most disputes were settled directly by the social partners, and the number of strikes had fallen dramatically.

46. The number of health-care establishments had risen over the past decade. There were now 144 hospitals, 959 health-care centres and 4,714 health stations, in which 4,858 doctors, 5,772 health-care professionals, 14,558 assistants, 4,208 administrative employees and 332 executives were working. Health expenditures had increased substantially in recent years, with the rate of growth, which had been negative (-14 per cent) between 1985 and 1990, reaching 22 per cent between 1991 and 1995. Resources provided by external cooperation had also risen, to $202 million.

47. Women held a central place in health policy. Improving women's health would enable other objectives in the health and demographic areas to be realized, such as ensuring perinatal and infant health and curbing population growth. The most important successes in that area were improved vaccination coverage of infants under one year of age - more than 90 per cent in 1995 - eradication of poliomyelitis and a marked decline in the measles rate. Infant mortality had fallen steadily, from 110 per thousand live births in the period 1970-1975 to 56 per thousand in the period 1990-1995. The objective was to bring it down to 41 per thousand by the year 2000.

48. A programme for combating acute respiratory infections, which were the primary cause of death among children, had been set up with the help of the Pan-American Health Organization (PAHO) and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The aim was to halve mortality resulting from such infections. The Government had also succeeded in lowering the number of cases of tuberculosis: in 1996, 26,664 cases had been diagnosed and treated, or 30 per cent fewer than in 1993 and 17.4 per cent fewer than in 1995. The Ministry of Health had also created a programme for combating sexually transmitted diseases and AIDS.

49. As a result of those policies and programmes, life expectancy at birth had been 67 years in the period 1990-1995, and was projected to reach 70 years for the period 2000-2005 (67 years for men and 72 years for women). That progress had earned the Peruvian Government the PAHO annual prize for the country making the most progress in the field of health. However, much remained to be done, particularly in reducing the maternal mortality rate, disparities in health indicators between urban and rural areas, and chronic malnutrition levels among children.

50. As part of its efforts to build an increasingly efficient and rational State, the Peruvian Government was devoting considerable resources to social development. During the period 1997-2000, it expected to build on its accomplishments in order to achieve observance and effective enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights at the earliest possible date.

The meeting rose at 1.05 p.m.